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TEACHING ENGLISH TO THE MAJORITY.

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BECAUSE AVERAGE AND BELOW-AVERAGE STUDENTS DO NOT FIND THE WRITTEN WORD ESSENTIALLY MEANINGFUL, AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THAT OF THE TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE-AND-LITERATURE ENGLISH PROGRAM IS NEEDED. SUCH A PROGRAM BEGINS WITH AND FOCUSES ON THE STUDENTS' OWN PAST AND PRESENT EXPERIENCES. STUDENTS ARE PROVIDED WITH VIVID AND SIGNIFICANT SENSE-EXPERIENCES WHICH STIMULATE AND FREE THE IMAGINATION AND FURNISH THE STARTING POINT FOR "PERSONAL WRITING"--THE ARTICULATION OF THE STUDENTS' OWN RESPONSES. STUDENTS ARE ALSO ENCOURAGED TO USE THEIR MEMORIES TO ANALYZE, EXAMINE, AND RECAPTURE IN WORDS LESS IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCES AND INTERESTS. LITERATURE IS INCORPORATED INTO THE PROGRAM TO PROVIDE ANOTHER DIMENSION TO THE STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE, MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR HIM TO BECOME MANY MEN, YET REMAIN HIMSELF, AND THUS BECOME A MORE HUMANE INDIVIDUAL. SUCH MATTERS AS PUNCTUATION, SPELLING, AND VOCABULARY STUDIES ARE NOT IGNORED, BUT ARE PART OF THE WRITING AND REWRITING PROCESS ITSELF. THIS APPROACH SHARPENS THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF EXPERIENCE AND ENABLES THEM TO ENGAGE ACTIVELY IN THE PROCESS OF MEANINGFULLY ORDERING AND ARTICULATING THAT EXPERIENCE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "THE RECORD" (COLUMBIA UNIV.), VOL. 69 (DEC. 1967), 223-241.) (DL)

Teaching English to the Majority

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This paper concerns itself with teaching English to the majority of secondary-school pupils, i.e., to those not at present in grammar schools or following what may be loosely termed grammar-school courses in comprehensive, technical or secondary-modern schools. As a convenient shorthand, we may dub these pupils 'average' or 'ordinary'. They will range, though, from the small percentage who, if they stayed at school long enough, could get a bare pass at G.C.E. 'O' Level to the larger percentage who leave school still finding reading and writing difficult. These are, in short, the pupils the *Newsom Report* was about.[1]

The prime danger of using labels at all—'average', 'ordinary', 'Newsom'—should at once be faced; it is that we lull ourselves into supposing that by sticking a label on these pupils we have explained them. Instead of 'secondary-moderns' they become 'Newsom children'; and we're back to Square One. We need constantly to remind ourselves that, like other children and indeed like we ourselves, they are human beings: "*chaque homme porte la forme entière de l'humaine condition.*" View in the light of this, if you will, the generalisations that lack of space inevitably forces upon this paper.

In order to decide what principles teaching English to the average (and under-average) should be based on, we must first consider at some length the pupils themselves.

"When you love anything, you want to fill your consciousness with it, to appreciate and enjoy it for itself. You don't want merely to know *about* the object: you want to know *it*."[2] These words of John Macmurray's point to a fundamental truth about average pupils. It is that they are as capable as their above-average fellows of knowing an object, if not knowing about it. They are not as linguistically enriched, true, but certainly their senses are no less alive and responsive, and their emotions no less fully human. Shylock's words about Jews can be applied with equal force to them: they, like their above-average fellows, have eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, are fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer.

Goethe's definition of an intellectual is a man for whom "the word is essentially fruitful." In this sense above-average pupils are intellectuals. So it is that since time

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1 Central Advisory Council for Education, *Half Our Future*, H.M.S.O., 1963.
2 John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*. Faber, 1935 and 1962.

out of mind the word has been the basis of grammar-school education. In the teaching of English in modern times, the word has usually been studied in two separate compartments, language and literature. Divorced from each other, too often has language-study become arid, a scrutiny of arteries without blood, and the study of literature degenerated into logorrhoea.

But average pupils are not intellectuals. Words are not essentially fruitful for them. A grammar-school approach based solely on language and literature, even when the approach is emasculated almost to the point of impotence in an attempt to make it suitable, misses the mark by a mile. (This is the all-too-familiar approach of those English courses which begin each chapter with a literary extract, followed by lots of quasi-comprehension questions.) By contrast, an approach through the wide-open gateways of the senses, involving and using the pupils' own experiences and interests, present and past, lands plumb on target.

There are three main methods: the first is to provide the pupils with vivid and significant sense-experience which feeds, frees and stimulates the imagination and which furnishes the starting-point for *personal writing* (see below); the second is to start with the pupils' present experiences and interests; the third is to begin by awakening and calling upon memory so that lost time is recaptured, and the experience and its accompanying emotion are relived in tranquillity before the pupils write. All three insist upon the primacy of sense-experience: all three call upon literature at the appropriate moments to enlarge and deepen the experience.

Basing Teaching on Experience What justification is there for basing the teaching of English on experience? That question is but part of the more fundamental one: How important is it in the complete education of the average pupil to feed and exercise his senses? One answer goes like this.

Advertisers have for long been busy perfecting a mirror-world for our pupils to live in. In it, the super-images show that the acquisition of material things will make them 'happy, successful, beautiful, handsome, popular, healthy'.[3] This is the secret of the good life. Walled in by these potent and bewildering mirrors, they never see themselves as they really are: the reflections only reveal what the advertisers wish them to, reveal only the modern manikins, faceless, with-it in every particular—like all the others. First-hand experience of reality is deliberately nullified. Thus, it becomes increasingly difficult for all pupils, let alone the average, to recognise that in truth the good life is based upon our relationships to the natural world and the people in it; and that this in turn is founded upon the life of the senses. We see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world; and without this experience of the world that our senses provided, no consciousness and no knowledge of any kind is possible. Our sense-life is central and fundamental to our human experience. If our sense-life is rich and full, then so is the whole of our living. If our sense-life is impoverished and narrow, then our own nature and our own living will be equally so. If we are to be fully alive and, indeed, full

3 Roy Lewis and Rosemary Stewart, *The Boss*. Phoenix House, 1958.

of life, we must first feed and exercise the senses so that we increase our capacity to experience the world and be aware of it, before we can refine and train our senses so that they lead to an increased sensibility. "Living through the educated senses is perhaps the very essence of all living" because it is "living in glad awareness, living in love."[4]

The Life of the Senses As Professor Louis Arnaud Reid has so aptly written, the life of the senses is charged with spiritual significance;[5] and this reminds us once again of the core of the teaching of such mystics and poets as Traherne and Wordsworth—teaching which lies at the heart of all education.

In *Education Through Art*, Sir Herbert Read argued that the basis of education should be *aesthetic*, i.e., that it should be "the education of those senses upon which consciousness, and ultimately the intelligence and judgement of the human individual, are based." Yet, as recently as 1959, Aldous Huxley could lament that the non-verbal humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, were still almost completely ignored, and that it was time we turned away from "merely symbolic straw and chaff to the bread of actual and substantial fact." Children must, of course, learn how to handle words (the straw and chaff) more effectively; but at the same time we must intensify their ability to look at the world directly and not through that half-opaque medium of concepts which distorts every given fact into the all-too-familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction. They must discover words through life, not use words as a substitute for life and experience.[6]

"They must discover words through life": here in a nutshell is the key to teaching English to the average. In this way words can be made 'essentially fruitful' for them, and their intellects as well as their senses and emotions fully engaged and developed.

The kind of teaching which for so long has been perpetrated upon average pupils in the name of English, and which is now being abandoned, is mockingly summed up in F. H. Townsend's quatrain:

> *O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,*
> *Or but a wandering voice?*
> State the alternative preferred,
> With reasons for your choice.

Its abandonment represents a veritable revolution. This revolution is all the time increasing in size and momentum as the evidence piles up that the great majority of pupils—not only the few—taught in the new way can write freshly and sincerely and will enjoy producing writing full of interest, with here and there creative touches that a poet might envy.

Personal Writing The production of this kind of writing lies at the heart of the revolution. It has quite properly become the central

4 J. McMurray, *op. cit.*
5 Louis Arnaud Reid, *Philosophy and Education.* Heinemann, 1962.
6 Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception.* Penguin Books, 1959.

concern of enlightened teachers of English because its quality—its immediacy, freshness, involvement, perceptiveness, appealing naïvety and unevenness, and so on—springs directly from the pupil's senses and feelings and experiences. It is commonly called 'creative writing', but it would be an advance if it were called 'personal' rather than 'creative'. The latter term, unless completely emptied of meaning, begs too many questions and narrows too much the field of experience and the variety of form of the writing; the former puts the emphasis where it belongs and is in addition so much more meaningful to pupils. It emphasizes that what they write, if they trust honestly and sincerely to their own personal reactions, will be worthwhile because it will be a unique expression of their own individuality.

Of course their competence will range from writing so weak in spelling, grammar and punctuation that it can be read only with difficulty to writing that is entirely free from mistakes.

Here are two examples of the former, both by 11-year-old pupils:

HARVERST

I am a bird siging in The Sky and it is harves The cambine is like a Red Speck and I can see The farmer. He is a baby boy The corn is a bright yellow colour. It dazzle me becase The sun is so bright I can't hardle see ware I am going. I can see a felld mouse geting at The corn. and The combene is so class to it I am a blac bird I swope downe after The bunf fly I am so tierd I culd dirp dead. and I noved abot for my lych I want a nise fat warm and a snail[7]

THE Kitn

THE KITN is verey lite
He is allsow genTLE,
he injoies hiself in The moring,
he as at resT in The afrnoon,
When he sleeps you can here is hert a-beeting,
And you can FeeL hes FLUFY

AT NITE

HE is verey savige,
We shut ThE Door
He is in won COWNER
Waiting foR is Pray
you can see is
shinning GREEN eis.
HERE comes The Mices, won, to, three.
the KITN is lik a STATu,
He Caches won and bits of is hed.
Nobody nos where is hed gos.
The KITN MasTr com down in The moring

7 See A. W. Rowe, "*In Their Own Write*," *Where?*, Spring 1965.

AND FIND The BLOD OF The mows,
down on The FLOR,
AND The mows was quiet nere.

Yet surely quality is there: the pupils identify themselves as completely with bird and kitten as does Lawrence with tortoise and kangaroo, or Ted Hughes with hawk, jaguar, tomcat and otter.

And here are two examples by 12-year-olds of the latter:

MY WHITE KITTEN

So white is my kitten she looks like milk,
Small, so small, she can lie in my hands,
Round as a ball of soft white wool,
She rolls about the floor like a ball.
She drinks her milk, then on her blanket sleeps.
The breathing of my kitten is so quiet
Quiet she lies, white and still as milk.
Playful and graceful my kitten is.

THE TOMCAT

Stealthily he slithers
Like a black snake toward his prey.
Sleaky and long,
Swift in movement, agile and intent.
A rustle of grass.
His soft pads make no sound, only that of the wind.
Black as coal, a shine like coal, now lying in wait
ready to pounce.
The sunlight peaks through the leaves,
Shows his glossy body,
Tells the small creatures to beware.

The starting-point in experience for both these poems was pets brought into the classroom and, before being written about, observed *as if for the first time*. The effort, in Huxley's words, was to look at and experience each pet directly, rather than through that half-opaque medium of concepts which distorts every given fact into the all-too-familiar likeness of some general label. In a word, the pupil was helped, for instance, to see *that* particular pet in all its uniqueness rather than just *a* pet; and the writing showed that most pupils succeeded.

Often, too, imagination will work its own obscure magic and a pupil will write better than he knows.

THE OWL

On a moonlight night,
An owl broke the silence,
With his shrill screech,

His big round piercing eyes staring down,
In search of some poor creature
Who he could make their plight.
His hunger now grew till he could not bear it,
He heard a scurry of a mouse,
And with one push went gliding down,
On to the trembling creatures back,
He carried it trembling through the night,
And eating it he saw delight.
The wourld was dark and cold,
The owl broke the silence To whit To who,
One bound he landed on the ground,
The baby rabbits huddled together
With trembling bodies.

THE ELEPHANT

This great grey crane lumbers through the jungle,
Its white ivory levers gleaming in the sun,
Its large feet crushing saplings as we would snap twigs.
Yet handling the tree trunks as if they were babies.
No petrol for this one's fuel, just grass and leaves.
Its trumpeting echoes through the trees,
Shaking each branch and leaf with its throbbing power.

(The starting-point for both was photographs.)

Providing Sense–Experience The above are simple illustrations of the first main way of approaching through the wide-open gateways of the senses, i.e., providing the pupils with a chosen sense-experience, then with the utmost tact and sensitivity drawing out its significance so that it becomes the starting-point for personal writing. Because even now it is the least-practised and most unfamiliar of the three methods, some further illustration may not perhaps come amiss.

Those of you who remember what has come to be known as the 'bubbles sequence' from the BBC TV documentary film, *The Schools*, will have seen the pioneer example of the method in action.[8] In that lesson, pupils and teacher together sought and found words to describe the bubbles that were being born in their frail myriads right there in the classroom. These words the teacher put on the blackboard; and when at last the pupils wrote they were exhorted to use as many of these words as possible, for one of the aims of the lesson was to expand each pupil's vocabulary: "Man builds himself as he builds his language." Here are some recent examples of writing done in a similar lesson. The words in italics were those put on the board.

8 Lesson taught by Peter Emmens, the head of English department, The Margaret Tabor Secondary School.

Sonia can't spell:

"The excited child diped the *magic wand* in to the horible slimey liqwid and pouted her lips like a fish which send out *bubbles* of air, just as she was preparing to do now. She blew the *transparent* film of *soapy solution* and a clear shoal of beutiful, *dancing*, bubbles cam *gracefully* out into their new world.

"The child was quiet taken aback by their beuty and just gapd in wonder. The bubbles were *iridescent*, *spherical* in shape and of all sizes, and the *reflections* of the room shared in there beuty."

In Christine's short piece, the exquisite imagery is all her own:

"Things of fairylike, *fragile* beauty slipping on an invisible slide of air, *iridescent*, manufactured from a film of *solution* in a monocle: so *bubbles* give joy to all who see, with strings of multi-coloured pearls and curved rainbows captured within their *soapy* skins."

Fred questions the miraculous beauty of these bubbles:

"These *spherical* objects, full of beauty, flew through the air, *continuously rotating* on their short voyage to destruction. Why is it these *transparent* balls of film have so much beauty?"

Julie comments upon the brevity of their existence:

"The colours within these little *spherical bubbles* play with the light, *dancing*. The *reflections* of everything in the room mingle with the ever-changing colours. How short the *fragile* life of a bubble is."

And Wendy laments, in their easy destruction and quick passing, the ugliness of much of life and the transience of all beauty:

"One gentle puff and they're away. Set free, they rise gently into the air. Then slowly they descend to the earth where they perish with their *iridescent* colours. No man has ever made such beautiful things as these.

"As they rise, some *bubbles* join onto others, as if to take refuge, or be protected from human beings who burst them with large ugly hands.

"As they slowly descend their colours change *kaleidoscopically*. Some die before they reach the floor. Now their *ephemeral* lives are over. They disappear into thin air. What a pity that such radiant and beautiful things should die so suddenly and quickly."

All these children reacted intensely and pleasurably to the vivid sense-experience of seeing their classroom filled with bubbles. Their teacher elicited from them words to describe their experience; and where these words were not forthcoming, he supplied them. Their writing is therefore in a sense a corporate affair, for each was freely borrowing from the stock of words they had together collected on the blackboard. Part of the success of the teaching is to be assessed by the number of words they borrowed and used perceptively, part by how, despite the family likeness of their vocabularies, each piece had its own individuality, and part by how many of the new words they made their own and used later. Whatever the result, there can be no doubt at all that the children enjoyed this writing. Personal writing is certainly writing for fun, writing for the pleasure that is in it.

All kinds of starting points in experience may be used to set children writing eagerly and enjoyably—and often freshly and creatively, too.[9]

Pupils can be asked, say, to leave their classroom at once after a spring shower, and come back and report what their alerted senses have experienced.

(1)

After the rain the grass feels very wet,
And through the air is a misty feeling;
The quiet drips from the trees slither,
And on the flowers drops of rain
Like diamonds glitter in the spring sun.
Flowers with a tinge of scent suddenly catch you as you pass.
The bark of the tree is dark where the rain has pounced upon it.

(2)

There was a mist which covered the sky;
The rain lazily and slowly appeared.
The grass squeaked beneath my feet,
Birds still sang in the dripping trees.
The windows were practically opaque.
Figures passing by the window were distorted,
As oval-shaped raindrops dripped on the glass.
The grass was covered with a carpet of shimmering diamonds,
The red brick walls were like an unpolished front doorstep.
The large blood-red roses appeared to be very much alive;
They looked larger and more beautiful in the rain.
Water gushed out of the pipe into the drain below—
Everything, everywhere, looked wonderfully clean.

To some, it may be a little surprising that these pupils of thirteen could respond so freshly to going out after a spring shower, something they must have done hundreds of times before. Part of the reason lies in the way the teacher prepared them for the experience; part perhaps in what the following piece tells us.

"It's raining, and the birds have disappeared, the children's voices are absent from the still, quiet morning air. I love the rain; it has a kind of warmth that makes me think that I am the only one in the world, that other people in secluded homes, in small rooms thinking they are safe from the rain, as it tries to break through the window panes, are missing so much. The rain makes my imagination crisp and vibrant, and beauty more beautiful."

Any aspect of the natural world can act as a powerful stimulus to set pupils writing. One of the quadrangles in a school has an almond-tree growing among flower beds. Some twelve-year-old pupils were sent into the quad on a lovely spring day to note what they saw and heard and touched and smelled.

Joy chose to write about the almond-tree, which was then just past its best.

9 For an account of the method in use, see Robert Druce, *The Eye of Innocence*. Brockhampton Press, 1965.

"It is spring and the almond has blosomed. The shape like a tall mushroom. Thin and elegant its trunk, rough and bumpy the bark. The flowers the shape of the pink wild rose. In clusters they hang, each bunch lifting its head to the sun. They smell like the wild bees honey, sweet, yet not like anything else. On the floor a carpet of pink where the petals fall, like soft coloured snow. Petal by petal until all are gone."

Freda's piece is not so fine as Joy's, but it does show that she enjoyed using her senses.

"The petals grow in five and fours and they fall separately. The trunk is long and sometimes twisted and grows straight to where the branches spread out. There are tiny green lines going down the trunk, and the colour of the blossom is pale pink.

"The flower itself is like a wild rose and it smells like the raw wool off a sheep's back —not very pleasant."

Ben's piece is really a series of notes. He ignored the almond-tree and concentrated upon other things in the quadrangle: his title, *The Beauties of Early Springtime*.

"Specs yellow as the sun peeped through small gaps between the tips of the Forsythia sepals, which enclosed the delicate and tiny buds of the forthcoming flowers. The green sepals were as smooth as glass.

"Yellow-tipped tulip leaves were cold in the early sunshine. The sharp-edged leaves were as smooth as water.

"A rough, bumpy stone sat on the soil. It was sharp at the edges and had a dirty surface. It was light grey and white, with a black patch that stood out even though it was small.

"The bark of the Prunus tree looked like moss and it was a slightly-dirty, mossy green. The soft, mossy bark was ridged. Beneath the bark was the solid tree itself, light brown in colour. The fruit of the Prunus tree was as wrinkled as a squashed toffee. It was dark brown, with minute patches of black here and there. It had a rough texture, and would, if it was pressed hard enough, squash a bit.

"Mauve crocuses glistened in the warm sunshine. The petals were warm, and as soft as grass. The orangy-yellow colour in the middle of the flowers was the pollen. The sticky stalks of the crocuses were a dark mauve. They grow under the spreading branches of the Japanese Cherry tree."

Ideally, teachers using this method should often write when their pupils write and offer their work with its crossings-out, re-phrasings, and second-thoughts for comment and criticisms, just as the pupils offer theirs. The page which shows this kind of creative travail should become standard; the neat and tidy and oh-so-dull page should be eschewed.

Teachers should also be able to use words as evocatively as does the modern copywriter. For example, here are the instructions that were issued to a class to take home and study before they went out into a fog.

"Go out into the fog. Be alert. Imagine that you are a very sensitive recording instrument out in a fog *for the very first time*. Be aware of all that your senses tell you.

"What do you see? Is there any colour? Is the fog itself coloured? How does light—from a torch, a street lamp, a car headlight—penetrate the fog? Is the light itself alter-

ed? How far can you see? Do vague shapes—of trees, hedges, lampposts, fences, vehicles, buildings, people—loom, harden, assume their normal identity as you approach them?

"What can you hear? Are the big sounds, the sounds you can identify at once, altered? In what way? Listen to the tiny sounds: the sound of your own breathing, the disembodied stir of animals, the whisper of leaves and litter on the pavement, the bandaged fall of footsteps.

"Put out your tongue: what does the fog taste like? Smell it. What smells is it also carrying with it? Try to distinguish them.

"Is the fog swirling, lifting, circling, settling? What does it feel like? Try to touch it, to handle it. How is it touching you—your hair, eyes, lips, hands, skin? Is it dank, clinging, cold?

"Stand quite still from time to time. Allow the fog to close in on you, to enwrap you. Do you feel that the fog has a strange life of its own? Could you easily imagine that it was actually alive?

"Give yourself time afterwards to jot down brief notes of your impressions, just enough to bring back to your mind the freshness and immediacy of what your senses recorded."[10]

And here are four pieces of verse that some thirteen-year-olds produced after they'd been out in a fog:

Leslie's:

Slowly, slowly moving,
Like a dark blanket
The fog drifts past the petrified blades of white.
How long will it last,
I ask myself,
This castor-oil-tasting fog?
It changes every little thing
And so slowly, slowly it moves.

Jean's:

The fog is harsh and cold,
And hits you as you enter its world.
It devours all things.
And leaves you lost; alone.
Each blade of grass has been dipped in ice
And the bushes are recreated like silver Christmas trees.
Figures fade from human sight,
Envelopd by this magic, and are gone,
Who knows where?
Voices are softend by the strange power
That wipes out sky and earth.
I open my mouth to bite it,

10 Quoted from A. W. Rowe and Peter Emmens, *English through Experience,* Book I. Blond Educational, 1963.

But nothing's there,
Although it fills my mouth and nose and ears.

Maria's: I step out onto a floating floor,
And see other people as ghostly shadows,
I wonder if I appear the same to them.
The air is full of clingy coldness,
Like a kitchen full of smoke
When the dinner's turned out an utter despair.
Trees stretch out their long, bony fingers,
Sprinkled with icing-sugar.
I take a deep breath amid this fairy-land,
And steam drifts from my mouth,
As if I was a boiling hot pudding.
Space feels all the same to me now.
Near and far the same distance.
And silk-coated cobwebs are threaded with silvery-white trimmings.

Stephen's: *Ghost Fog*
A grey ghost,
A fallen sky--
Lying low,
Lingering high.

Colour no more:
Killing the sun,
This ghost Fog
Has fought and won!!

In the next pieces, written by 12-year-old pupils in a secondary school in a northern city, a similar method was used and the pupils were given the image, "Smoke from fires, a snake," to set them writing on autumn.

Smoke from fires, a snake,
Thoughtlessly drifting into nowhere
The sizzling aroma of the roasting leaves,
The oblivions of colours, red and gold,
The ghostly blue fire with the wind sweeping across it.
The rain deluging down,
And washing the leaves down the gutter,
The ice, glowing on the branches,
Making the trees incandescent.

* * *

Smoke from fires--
A snake

Chasing its prey through the sky—
It smells like toast burning—
The flames like blood,
Licking at the wood,
Eating the wood away.

You hear the bats squeaking,
The moon, a clear orange,
The rain drowning dead leaves,
The trees,
Shedding their coats of many colours.

The dawnings,
Like a muffled horn—
The evenings,
Like a goldfish glare—
A dagger blinding.

* * *

Smoke from fires a snake,
Writhing in the air as if to join the clouds,
All ascending from the flames of fires.
As if climing a staircase skywards,

A sweet fresh smell from the burning leaves,
The fire a rainbow of colours,
The flames dashing about in the sky,
The smoke getting in your eyes.

The crackling of hedges,
The rain deluging down, swashing the leaves,
The scurying of animals,
Traing not to get wet.

The luminous spiders webs,
Strewn from branch to branch,
The silent Whoooo of the owl in the tree,
The moon a silver ball in the night sky,
The croak of a frog sitting on the bank
The silent footsteps of the farmer going home.

The pale, ill sun, striving against the mist,
The lurid, red sky like a blazing fire,
Then the quick descending night,
The fog blocking the way of sight,
The errie night returning.

This girl rejected the image for her own good reasons.

"The leaves turn golden brown and fall to the soft soil beneath. The sky changes colour so often that you would think it was summer, autumn, winter and spring in one month. The days grow colder and darker and the winter woollies take their turn in seeing the out-side world. The rich brown conkers shine in the distant faraway sun, which is some-times shy to show itself behind the grey uninviteful clouds. The cool soft breeze hurries whistfully along on it's way dusting off cobwebs and making old bones gay. The tree's stand like old men with rheumatism, there shadows down on the not so green fields. The children scamper along like leaves in the wind with red ruddy cheeks glowing a-fire. The brambles are nearly finished now and dull becomes the flower.

"I can still smell apples in the orchard fragrant and sweet of aroma I can hear the crackling of the leaves under-foot and those being blown by the cool whispy breeze. Before I lay my thoughtful head on my flufed up pillow bright, I see a twingling star, brighter than all the rest, and I think of Jesus Christ our Lord and King, who died to save us all."

The other two main approaches—starting with the pupils' present experiences and interests; and awakening and calling upon memory so that lost time is recaptured, and the experience and its accompanying emotion are relived in tranquility before the pupils write—will also produce personal writing of quality.

Mr. Boncham

Mr. Boncham had a very thin bild. His thin legs were twice as long as his body. His hair always looked as if it hadn't been comed for a year, and knowing him I don't suppose it had. Two large cheek-bones jutted out from his face. His lips were very thin. His own six teeth were all bad, two were yellow, and the rest were black. His false teeth were his pride and joy, he showed them whenever he could. His nose looked like a protruding right-angle triangle and his nostrils were extremely large. His eyes were small, covered in veins, and sly. He wasn't a clean-shaven man, in fact once he grew a beard which didn't suit him at all.

His hands were rough and bony and smothered in nicotine. His feet were large and he took size 13 in shoes. Altogether in both his looks and his ways he was a mess, and because of this he was nicknamed 'Old Boney', which just suited him.

(Christine, aged 11.)

Mr. Smith

I remember him as being a fat mean old miser. He was so very fat through always stuffing himself with food, and when he talked he weezed. His face was round and fleshy, his cheeks hung down over his mouth. He had little blue eyes like a pigs. His mouth was small and filled with bad teeth. His nose was large and hairy. He always twitched it as though he was trying to detect food. Overhanging his eyes were a pair of enormous eyebrows. His hair hung over his head as though it had never been combed or brushed.

While I was at school I never once noticed a change of cloths by him; he always wore a dirty tweed jacket and baggy grey flannels. His shoes were supposed to be black but they were a dirty grey colour. As I remember we called him 'Piggy'.

(Gary, aged 11.)

My Dad

My dad is small and fat and has very white legs. He gets gout sometimes in the year which I will get as I get older as things go from Father to Daughter. When he gets gout he gets grouchy and grumpy and there's always something wrong. But when he hasen't got gout he's quite alright realy but if I play the radio to loud or record player the house is in an up roar, and, if you argue the point with him he's worse still. He works in a shop but hardly does any work at all he's so lazy and sometimes when I just pop my head round the corner to ask my mum if I can go down to my Aunties he'll say: "Ah! just the person I want this floor's getting so dirty and your brother's just brought in the order's", then when I just walk down to get the brush to sweep the floor crash, wallop, bang he goes and trips me up and he laughs and laughs, but! believe me it isn't very nice being triped up by him.

My pop has grey hairs (he says I cause them), and when he combs his hairs a lot of them comes out. My dad always wears baggy trousers and a kind of checked shirt. His hobby room is right next to my bedroom and boy does it make a noise, he does wirelessing and gets all different kinds of nationalists on it, but, there's one rule he's made. Nobody must touch anything. He's alway's like that if any body touches one of the electric plugs or anything like that he says, "There goes another plug", he say's to my mum, "you carn't trust any-one of 'em' in this house". If he happens to be hungry he's awful he mourns, argues and picks quarrels, and, some-times when he's quarreling he does not finish his sentence he just say's "Bah! . . . your just oh!" But my mum does not take any notise she just says that its nothing when he's finished and if he asks her what she thought of anything she'll just say, "Yes dear, No dear, of cause dear",. When he's in a good mood he's rather alright, he'll play with you and our bulldog to. Once when I was playing with him he let me twist his arm and hurt it, and, he twisted mine and boy did he, my mum said that she chucked riving with him because he was strong. My dad's been to France and can speak French smashingly, he once asked me a question in French (after I had told him that we had been learning French at school) and all I could say was "hey! say it again I didn't catch that bit", and, he'd say it again but I still did'nt catch it so I just gave up trying to. Sometimes my dad swears but not alot, you have to get him in a bit of rage before he'll swear at you. My dad has another hobby besides wirelessing he likes photography very much indeed, he usually takes moving pictures with a cine (I think) in colour, he has a projector and moviescreen which we all bought for his birthday he has shown us one film on it so far, that is all he has ready for it yet I think. He get's a photography book every week as well as a wireless world book. He like's gardening as well and made my Grans gardn look smashing, I think that he has green fingers. My dad just about practicly lives on tea he never drinks alcohol he used to but since the war I think it was he has had none. Instead he smoke a pipe, he used to smoke cigarets my mam said we got him off cigs alright but he was so grumpy and grouchy that they put him on to smoking a pipe which he still smokes and I sometimes get the job of cleaning the pipes.

(Barbara, aged 13.)

How dreadfull to be closed in,
To be walled in on every side,
You feel like a prisner in a cell,
Everything echos just like a well.

Isn't it awfull to go down in a lift
No doors, no windows and not very much air
And the crowds pile in till no more can bear.

You feel as though you want to run
Go out in the air and run run run.
Be free of walls or doors or chairs
Be out in air the fresh fresh air
Be out in the air.

Isn't it a fierfull experience
To be locked in.
To go in a very small room
And to be locked in.
When you go up in a lift you feel
As though you want to run.
Run and get some air
Not locked in.

Isn't it deadful, four walls one floor one roof,
The blood rushing to the head as if to burst at any time.

(Margaret, aged 12.)

A Night to Remember

A sudden flash of lightning fills the sky, then a row of sparks flow out as though they were going to blind me in the eyes or even burn my fur. The cracking of whips seem to bring terrified thoughts into my mind, I scamper under the table, and through a hole in the door a little carton is pushed in. I go to pick it up, but its alight and it explodes in my mouth. I yelp with pain and fright, I don't know where to go, I want to be somewhere else, I want to go somewhere quiet where I can sleep. Nobody cares for animals like us. We're frightened, our masters and friends arent.

(Marilyn, aged 11.)

I had been living with my grandparents for four years. My mother went to work all the day. So I only saw her before going to bed. I got on well with my granddad. He was a jolly man with short white hair. My grandmam was a little short-tempered and strict. This is why I stuck close to granddad.

As for my father, I couldn't say. My mam never talked of him. Granddad told me he was killed in the war. As I was only small I didn't understand and took it for granted he was.

Then my mother started going out with a man. I didn't like him much. My grand-

mam being strict, took a dislikeing to my mother's manfriend. Maybe she thought I was being left out.

When I was 11, on the 1st August, 1961, they married. By now I had excepted Sam as my father. At eleven my mother took me aside one night. I listened to the words she spoke with amazement.

"When I was 22 I mçt your father. I was young and thoughtless and I became pregnant. As soon as he found out he ran off. I went to work and tried to bring you up descent."

I sat motionless a couple of seconds. Then I hugged my mother, feeling angry yet thankful. My mother and father have been married nearly five years, I still don't get on well with my stepfather, but I try hard because of my mother.

(June, aged 15.)

So far, so good. But what about the rest of the English programme? One could turn to personal writing merely as an antidote to the hard but necessary grind of the 'real' English adumbrated by F. H. Townsend's quatrain. This just wouldn't do. Instead, around each main theme for personal writing should be built units of work in which all other necessary kinds of English activity are organically related to the main theme and derive from it significance, purpose, momentum, and direction. These activities will include: descriptive writing; training in making and using notes; discussion; story-telling; letter-writing; writing involving research; composition; language work, including a functional approach to punctuation, word-order, sentence-structures, and vocabulary-building; comprehension and summarising; and even, if one thought it useful, some functional grammar.

A sample skeleton plan for such a unit of work could be laid out like this:

a. A piece (or pieces) of personal writing, set in train by the chosen stimulus or experience, e.g., fire, sounds, 'blindness', smells, running, fireworks, sea-objects (shells, driftwood, etc.), music, pictures, fog, high winds, autumn, people, places, harvest, pain and illness.

b. Treatment of a new unit of punctuation.

c. Another piece of writing, linked to the original experience, e.g., accurate description (of exactly how to strike a match, for instance), imaginative description, factual reports, letters, story-telling, expression of a point-of-view.

d. Further treatment if necessary of the unit of punctuation or of another unit related to it.

e. Vocabulary enrichment, where the words are searched for to describe the experience, or arise out of it, before being used by the pupils.

f. Word-order, sentence-structure, and sentence-construction, based on good models (see below), the themes of which are related to the original experience.

g. More vocabulary work, the words this time being used as talking-points or to build sentences around.

h. 'Individual Activities', a list of varied tasks which ensures: (i) that no pupil need ever be idle, part of the list being designed to stretch the abler pupils to the utter-

most; (ii) great flexibility because pupils may be directed to the kind of activities they are most in need of.

i. An anthology of prose and verse. This will at once engage the pupils' interest because they see that they and the authors are fellow-craftsmen writing on the same (or related) themes.

Language and literature can be treated as complementary parts of the one whole, as they should be. And literature—the chosen words in the chosen order—comes here into its own. Here is the opportunity to add that other dimension to the pupil's experience. Here, invoking inspiration and good fortune, comes the chance to make more humane the pupil's whole consciousness, to bring him to reject the facts as they are *for him* in favour of the facts as they *are*, to make it possible for him to become many men and yet remain himself, to enable him to transcend himself and yet be never more himself than when he does.[11]

Yes—but for the average pupils what literature? It would, I think, be helpful for a start to drop the word, if only because it has so many minority and misleading associations, and to substitute 'writing'. What writing, then, for average pupils? This is a large question which deserves a paper on its own. What can usefully be said here is that the writing should be concrete and direct, its vocabulary fairly simple, and the sentence-structure relatively uncomplicated. An important consideration, the vocabulary should be modern as well as simple—certainly not old-fashioned (the pupils' favourite word). The writing should be closely-linked to that oral tradition which many of the greatest of our writers have always been close to and which is at present so potently being used by certain short-story writers and writers for TV and radio. And, of course, we should begin with the moderns: because they are the antennae of the general consciousness they belong in a very special sense to the young.

Let me make a plea for the increased use of the short story. Wisely chosen, this is the perfect vehicle for involving average pupils in the kind of discussion about life and living which to them makes sense.[12] Characters, situations, background—these must be as carefully watched as concreteness, vocabulary and sentence-structure. The story should also be no longer than can be read in a period, with some time left for discussion.

By way of illustration, I offer a short list: Richard Hughes's *A Night at a Cottage*, Stan Barstow's *One of the Virtues*, and Alan Paton's *Ha'penny* for first and second years; Patrick O'Brian's *Samphire*, Vance Palmer's *The Catch*, Geoffrey Dutton's *The Wedge-Tailed Eagle*, Dan Jacobson's *The Little Pet*, and Stan Barstow's *The Fury* for third and fourth years; Neil Patterson's *Three Fingers are Plenty*, Ray Bradbury's *The Other Foot*, Bill Naughton's *Tom's Sister*, Alberto Moravia's *The Room and the Street*, and Borden Deal's *Antaeus* for fourth years upwards. No Joyce, Conrad, Forster, Faulkner, Scott Fitzgerald, T. F. Powys, you notice; not even H. E. Bates, Elizabeth

11 See C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 1961.
12 See Preface, A. W. Rowe, Ed., *People Like Us, Short Stories for Secondary Schools*. Faber, 1965.

Bowen, Angus Wilson, V. S. Pritchett, all of whom have appeared in recent anthologies aimed at average pupils. Such writers are by and large too subtle, too sophisticated, too literary—too deep if you prefer it.

Poetry? Yes, indeed. The recipe for success? Begin with ballads, and narrative poetry, modern as well as folk and traditional (and use recordings). There are many fine moderns to choose from: W. H. Auden, Charles Causley, Thomas V. Tierney, Robert Graves, John Manifold, Thom Gunn, Leslie Norris, Robert Frost, A. B. ('Banjo') Paterson, Louis MacNeice, Norman Cameron, David Martin, Edwin Muir, Donald Hall, Ezra Pound, not forgetting Masefield and Kipling. Use in plenty the great Anon; mix with jingles and humorous verse; ransack the moderns for lyric poetry that is both *logos* (something said) as well as *poiema* (something made); shun most of the stuff masquerading as poetry in school anthologies; add passages of high-temperature prose, prose that is far more poetic than much that goes under the name of poetry; read aloud well (preferably *con amore*) and have the pupils—at the right times—joining in.

A word about competence. In order to achieve a minimum competence, an ability to write bread-and-butter English, many teachers have spent most of their English lessons putting pupils through aeons of trivial routines: displaying the orts of a long-discredited grammar, doing punctuation and spelling exercises, filling in blanks in sentences, learning lists of words, sending armies of pseudo-telegrams, writing unending letters of application for hypothetical jobs, putting together innumerable compositions —and all *in vacuo*. Their justification has been that all we should attempt (or even hope) to achieve with average and below-average pupils is some sort of shallow literacy. But the irony of it is that their routine singularly fails to achieve their objective. And no wonder. For what their faith really amounts to is that the best way to cure a starving man is to go on starving him or at best to feed him on a carbohydrate diet when what he in fact needs in a high-protein diet full of the necessary vitamins and mineral elements.

The truth is that competence comes only when the pupil is motivated, when he in fact sees the reason for acquiring it and genuinely wants to. A pupil does not necessarily learn from his own mistakes; he only learns from them when he puts the mistakes right, resolves not to make the same mistakes again, and consciously takes the necessary measures to turn his resolve into reality. Writing is meant to be read; it is a means of communication or it is nothing. To make sure that there is an audience for a pupil's writing is one of the best ways of involving him in the struggle to reach a satisfactory standard of competence, and one need not list here the large number of well-tried ways of doing this. From about the third year on, too, it would be useful if a pupil could have at his elbow some simple means of self-correction.[13]

Man builds himself as he builds his language: "the writing develops the writer." English as a subject should excite, feed, and strengthen the pupil's sense of wonder and delight. It should nourish and extend his capacity to experience the world directly and then, by verbalising this experience, to control it, structure it, and make it more mean-

13 See A. W. Rowe, *Desk Book of Plain English*. Blackwell, 1965.

ingful and a part of himself. The teacher should above all link this activity to the experiencing of literature so that the pupil's consciousness and sensibility are enlarged and refined. This is an enrichment programme, as valid for the below-average as for the average and—though it is outside my remit—for the above-average also.

At the beginning of this paper I talked about the coming of a necessary and long-overdue revolution in teaching English to average pupils. Two factors are helping to spread it: the involvement of teachers and other specialists in the Certificate of Secondary Education, an involvement entailing the most searching reassessment of the what, the how, and the why of teaching and examining English; and the recent formation of the National Association for the Teaching of English. There is, though, no room for complacency: the latter has still at the time of writing only 3,000 or so members.